



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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VISITOR CENTER GROUNDBREAKING MARKS 50th ANNIVERSARY OF  
WORLD-FAMOUS PATUXENT WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTER

It will be back to the future on June 3 as the Interior Department's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, celebrates 50 years of pioneering accomplishments in wildlife research. Simultaneously, a groundbreaking ceremony for a unique new national wildlife visitor center will signal a new beginning for the next half century.

It's not surprising that the world's first wildlife research visitor center is located at Patuxent. Since its opening in 1939 as the Patuxent Research Refuge, the sprawling 4,700-acre tract graced with spacious meadows, woods, and wetlands has provided an outstanding outdoor laboratory for researchers. A historic plantation house, Snowden Hall, still stands on the grounds and the facility also includes several laboratories built in the late 1930's.

Patuxent is best known for its research on the effects of pesticides on wildlife, especially DDT, and endeavors to breed endangered species such as whooping cranes, eagles, and Andean condors in captivity.

Until now, owing to a lack of public-use facilities and the sensitive nature of much of the research conducted on its grounds, Patuxent has had to restrict visitor access. However, construction of the new visitor center, scheduled for completion in 1992, will enable the public to learn of Patuxent's historic role in wildlife conservation and research.

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The visitor center will house exhibits and other interpretive activities reflecting 50 years of wildlife research conducted at the Patuxent facility and its field laboratories spread across the Nation from Hawaii to Puerto Rico.

The interpretive facility is the product of a grassroots effort that created the "National Fund for the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center" under the Prince George's County Parks and Recreation Foundation. The committee is raising funds and encouraging Federal support for the education center.

Several organizations and individuals have already made significant contributions to the effort, including Beretta USA Corp., Kenneth H. Michael Companies, the State of Maryland, and Dr. Francis Uhler. In addition, Congress has appropriated \$900,000 toward the project.

On June 3, 50 years to the day Patuxent was established, a gathering of Congressional and Interior Department representatives, local officials, and the public will witness the groundbreaking.

The special anniversary ceremony and the groundbreaking will be held at 1:30 p.m. Owing to space limitations, individuals interested in attending should register by calling the Foundation at (301) 464-6708 between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

The day also will be marked by special tours, birdwalks, and demonstrations of various wildlife research techniques. Included will be the use of radiotelemetry in tracking animals, bird-banding, and live-trapping or netting. Noted biologist Chandler Robbins, author of Birds of North America, will lead several early morning birdwalks through Patuxent's wetlands and woods.

Perhaps the single most important finding made at Patuxent was the deleterious effects of DDT and other pesticides on birds. DDT was originally developed during World War II to protect soldiers from insect-borne diseases. It later became widely used as an efficient and inexpensive agent for pest control in agricultural and forested areas. While some biologists were wary of DDT's possible adverse impacts on wildlife, only limited studies were conducted.

English biologists first hinted that there might be a problem with DDT, but in 1969, Patuxent research proved that the pesticide was responsible for eggshell-thinning that was dramatically decreasing the population of eagles and other raptors. The research showed that DDT was metabolized in the birds and limited their ability to produce the calcium required for a strong, viable egg.

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Another hallmark Patuxent project has been long-term research aimed at saving whooping cranes and other critically endangered species of wildlife. Its efforts with whooping crane breeding began in 1967 when the species was considered on the brink of extinction. That year, a number of eggs were taken from nests in Canada and sent to Patuxent for incubation. The young birds that subsequently hatched formed a foundation for a captive flock and for research on ways to propagate these birds in captivity in order to supplement the small wild population. A total of approximately 150 whooping cranes can now be found in the wild.

Persons interested in donating to the fund for the visitor center should contact: The National Fund for the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, 13022 8th Street, Bowie, MD 20715, or call (301) 464-6708. The committee is a private, nonprofit organization and all contributions are tax-deductible.

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